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RUSSIA BID TO JOIN WORLD TRADE GROUP ADVANCING, SAYS U.S. ENVOY

Ambassador Burns says U.S., Russia “very close”
to WTO bilateral agreement

By Tim Receveur
Washington File Staff Writer

Washington – The United States and Russia are “very close” to a key bilateral agreement on Russia’s accession to the World Trade Organization (WTO), said U.S. Ambassador to Russia William Burns during an online discussion July 18.

Burns said that after intensive discussion before and during the Group of Eight (G8) summit, negotiators are “very close to a bilateral WTO agreement with Russia, one of the last hurdles to Russia’s formal accession. Our two lead negotiators have said that we ought to be able to sign a mutually beneficial bilateral agreement in October.”

Accession requires both bilateral and multilateral negotiations with existing WTO members on how Russia will transform its trade regime to conform to WTO rules.

President Bush said July 15 during the G8 summit in St. Petersburg, Russia, that a bilateral agreement with Russia “was almost reached,” although he added that “there’s more work to be done” on some issues before the deal could be approved by the U.S. Congress. “We want Russian accession to the WTO,” and the negotiations to achieve this would continue “in good faith,” Bush said.

U.S. Trade Representative Susan Schwab said “significant progress” was made during the talks. Once a deal is reached, Russia’s WTO accession then will move on to a multilateral process, she said.

Burns said during the July 18 online discussion – the State Department’s “Ask the Ambassador” program -- that Russia’s accession to the WTO would be “one of the most effective ways to promote fair trade.”

He acknowledged that corruption continues to be a major concern of both the Russian people, according to polls, and U.S. companies trying to do business with Russia.

“Corruption is a serious and growing problem here, much bigger than it was in my last experience in Russia a decade ago,” the ambassador said. “It’s going to take a lot of strong leadership and hard work to make a significant dent in the problem.”

He said Russian President Vladimir Putin “has taken several steps to remove allegedly corrupt officials,” and that the United States is supporting training programs for judges, prosecutors and law enforcement officials aimed at promoting budget transparency and competitive procurement.

Burns also said a middle class is beginning to emerge in Russia. Although it is not a cure-all for the problems Russia faces, a “tax-paying, politically engaged” middle class can provide the “core constituency for the kind of institutions that protect people’s interests in fair economic competition and good governance,” he said.

“That is a trend that simply didn’t exist when I last lived and worked in Russia ten years ago, and it holds a great deal of promise for the future,” although it will not happen overnight, Burns said.

During the G8 summit, President Bush unveiled an initiative to “support business training and entrepreneurial skills among the next generation of Russians,” the ambassador said. The program, called the “U.S.-Russian Foundation for Economic Advancement and Rule of Law,” is a “very good investment in Russia’s future, as well as our own,” Burns said.

U.S.-RUSSIAN COOPERATION ON NUCLEAR NON-PROLIFERATION

Burns was asked by a webchat participant about U.S.-Russian cooperation in fighting terrorism and nuclear proliferation. He said Bush and Putin had announced during the G8 summit a new international initiative to prevent nuclear terrorism and stop the spread of nuclear and radioactive materials.

“This is one area in which U.S.-Russian partnership can really make a difference” and the two countries have a responsibility to show leadership, Burns said.

“We’ve made a lot of progress over the last decade in tightening security at our own installations, and expect to help Russia complete security upgrades at its nuclear installations by the end of 2008,” he said.

For additional information, see related articles on the Bush-Putin announcement and an overview of the initiative by State Department Under Secretary Robert Joseph.

Burns also acknowledged the concerns of human rights groups and other nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) about a new Russian NGO law.

President Bush heard some of those worries from a group of young Russian civil society leaders with whom he met in St. Petersburg on July 14.

According to Burns, Putin said recently that “he did not seek to constrain the role of civil society in Russia.” The United States “will keep a careful eye on implementation of the law, and urge that it not be used to make life harder for NGOs who already contribute so much to Russia in areas ranging from education to health care to human rights,” the ambassador added.

A fact sheet on the U.S.-Russian Foundation for Economic Advancement and Rule of Law is available on the White House Web site:

<http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2006/07/20060715-4.html>

For more information on U.S. policies in the region, see Russia, Arms Control and Non-Proliferation, and G8 Summit 2006:

http://usinfo.state.gov/ei/economic_issues/group_of_8/g8_summit_2006.html

DIPLOMACY INTENSIFIES ON LEBANON CRISIS

U.S. goal is to strengthen Lebanon, officials say

By Judy Aita
Washington File UN Correspondent

United Nations -- Diplomatic efforts to end the fighting in southern Lebanon and help the Lebanese government gain control of its territory are increasing in anticipation of meetings scheduled at U.N. headquarters July 20.

U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan and the members of his special mission, led by Vijay Nambiar, will brief the 15-nation Security Council early in the day on the talks with Egypt, Lebanon and Israel. Annan is scheduled to meet with Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and European Union High Commissioner Javier Solana in the evening.

In Washington, State Department spokesman Sean McCormack said July 19 that Rice will "integrate what she hears" in New York into planning the diplomatic way forward. The secretary has been talking with Jordan's King Abdullah as well as leaders and foreign ministers of other countries in the region, including Saudi Arabia and Egypt.

"The current state of play," McCormack said, rests with the states in the region, such as Jordan, Egypt, and Saudi Arabia and others, who have condemned Hizballah's attack on Israel. They will have "an important role in bringing pressure to bear on the backers of Hizballah -- Syria and Iran, those states that do have leverage with Hizballah who could help bring about an end to the current violent situation."

"We want to see an end to the violence," McCormack said. "But we don't want ... the kind of cease-fire where Hizballah is allowed to regroup, rearm, strengthen, only to pose an even greater threat to the stability of the region."

White House press secretary Tony Snow on July 19 also said, "You cannot have a cease-fire that is unilateral." He said Hizballah shows no intention of laying down its arms, noting that the group's leader, Hassan Nasrallah, recently threatened attacks on Tel Aviv, Israel.

McCormack said Rice has spoken several times to Lebanese Prime Minister Fuad Siniora and that the United States has confidence in his leadership abilities. "We

believe he's an important leader for the people of Lebanon once they emerge from this crisis to chart a pathway forward for a more stable, prosperous, democratic Lebanon," he said.

Snow said it is important that the Lebanese government not be hostage to the terrorist organization and that it extends control over the country's entire territory.

France, which holds the Security Council presidency for the month of July, circulated a paper meant as a starting point for talks on what action the council could take. It includes not only humanitarian concerns and ending the hostilities but especially focuses on the long-term solution of helping the Lebanese government assert its authority throughout the country and the possibility of an international security force in southern Lebanon.

Any council action, French Ambassador to the United Nations Jean-Marc de La Sabliere said, also must "condemn the extremists who are seeking to destabilize the region and those who are assisting them."

U.S. Ambassador John Bolton said July 19 that the central objective of U.S. efforts will be to build on the statement of the leaders at the 2006 Group of Eight (G8) Summit and help the government of Lebanon extend authority throughout the country.

Bolton, the chief U.S. envoy to the United Nations, said that it might be appropriate for the Security Council to take "some action" after the briefing by Annan and the Nambiar mission, but he did not elaborate.

The ambassador said that the idea of calling for a cease-fire as a way to end the fighting was "simplistic."

"Any cease-fire is going to have to be accompanied by a qualitative change in the situation," Bolton said. "The simple reflexive action of asking for a cease-fire is not something that is really appropriate in a situation like this, because among other things, you have to know who are the parties" to any cease-fire.

"How do you get a cease-fire with a terrorist organization? I'm not sure anybody's done that before and I'm not sure it's possible," he said.

The United States is also consulting with others in the international community to find ways to help with Lebanon's humanitarian needs, McCormack said.

U.N. Deputy Secretary-General Mark Mallock Brown confirmed that Syria told the United Nations it would not accept Terje Roed-Larsen as part of the Nambiar mission. However, he said, the United Nations “did not have to grapple with what to do about Roed-Larsen” because Annan called the mission back to brief the Security Council.

Roed-Larsen is the secretary-general’s special representative on Resolution 1559, passed by the council in September 2004 calling for “the disbanding and disarmament of all Lebanese and non-Lebanese militias.”

SENATORS PRAISE U.S.-INDIA CIVIL NUCLEAR AGREEMENT

Senators address Indian American Friendship Council

By Lea Terhune
Washington File Special Correspondent

Washington – Chairman of the U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Committee Richard Lugar said that 2006 is significant not only as an anniversary of the Indian American Friendship Council (IAFC), but as a “year in which diplomacy has brought the U.S. and India together in what can be a significant partnership for world peace for decades to come.” He was speaking of the U.S.-India civil nuclear agreement to members of the council at their 10th annual Legislative Conference on Capitol Hill. (See related article.)

Lugar, one of those who steered the Senate Foreign Relations Committee toward its 16-2 vote in favor of the agreement, spoke of the hurdles encountered in the legislatures of both countries.

He said the agreement presented “a set of issues difficult for many in the parliament in India to debate, and it certainly has been difficult for members of the Senate and House of Representatives to resolve,” he said. Lugar attributed these difficulties in part to diligence and caution of the legislators.

“There was a feeling that the whole idea of nuclear proliferation in this world has taken a very bad turn,” he said, citing North Korea and Iran among other countries that could threaten global security. Lugar encouraged

greater cooperation in the energy sector beyond nuclear energy and the exploration of new energy resources.

Senator Paul Sarbanes told the gathering, “As the world’s largest democracy, India represents the hopes and aspirations of literally millions of people around the world, not just its own people, but beyond its own boundaries.” He said, “Your community has made enormous contributions to our society: in medicine, business, technology, engineering, on and on.”

“So the improved diplomatic relations with India bring tremendous benefits to both of our countries,” he said. Sarbanes echoed Lugar saying, “I believe this measure will enable the U.S. and India to proceed to a new stage of what has been a strong and mutually beneficial partnership.”

Senator Ben Nelson received an award from the council for his assistance to the Indian American community. He reflected upon global security concerns and the importance of cooperation in nuclear and other areas.

“I’m so very pleased,” he said, “how we can work together as functioning democracies in a world today that presents so much danger, so much uncertainty, so much hostility towards the democratic way of government and the democratic way of life.”

Several audience members expressed concern about the difficulties of getting student visas or visas for family members. Nelson acknowledged their concerns and urged the United States to “open the front door to legal immigrants.”

In this he was seconded by Senator John Cornyn, co-chairman of the India Caucus, who said, “We need to do better addressing America’s interests when it comes to our immigration system.”

“When we think about the contributions of Indian Americans we think of high skilled, high value contributions to our nation, and I think it’s the right thing to do to facilitate that and allow it to grow,” Cornyn added. The senator also expressed his support for nuclear cooperation with India.

Senator Ken Salazar said that besides the strong U.S.-India relationship, the diversity of America “is enriched by the 2 million Indian Americans who live here in the United States of America, who contribute to our economy, who enrich our life and culture.”

Salazar spoke of the importance of working together on energy issues, including conservation, renewable energy, biofuels, sharing of technology and research that go beyond current conventional energy sources. Like Lugar, he said developing new ways of processing coal is an area that merits research.

Among those attending the meeting were also Senators Mike DeWine, Lincoln Chaffee and Tom Carper. Minnesota State Senator Satveer Chaudhary, the first Indian American to be elected to that state's senate, urged Indian Americans to "be aware, get involved."

The Indian American Friendship Council was founded in 1990 to promote the interests of Indian American community and promote strong U.S. - India relations.

DIVERSITY VISA PROCESS SELECTS 82,000 APPLICANTS

Applicants could win one of 50,000 visas to United States

Washington – Approximately 82,000 people in 175 nations have received letters from the U.S. State Department informing them that they are eligible to apply for a permanent resident visa to the United States.

Only 50,000 such visas are issued each year in what is known as the Diversity Visa Lottery. More than 5.5 million people submitted entries in the registration process held during the last quarter of 2005.

A media note issued by the State Department July 18 says 82,000 applicants were selected at random in the lottery and encouraged to apply.

It is likely that many people involved in this initial stage will not follow through with their applications, so the selection of more than 80,000 should insure that all visas allowed under this program will be issued, the media note said.

The diversity visa lottery, designed to bring greater racial and ethnic diversity to the United States, offers permanent residency visas to citizens of nations that traditionally have a low level of immigration to the United States.

Anyone who applied but has not received notification to move to the next step in visa application has no further eligibility in this year's process and should prepare to apply at the end of this year when the next lottery opens.

The dates for the next lottery entry period will be announced in August.

In Africa, citizens from 50 nations will have the opportunity to apply for a diversity visa. The most lottery winners from any one African country – more than 9,800 – are in Nigeria, the continent's most populous country. Egypt was next, with more than 7,200 visa applicants selected, followed by Ethiopia with nearly 6,900.

Bangladesh has the highest number of potential applicants among Asian nations at 5,900. More than 1,500 Nepalese are being informed of their eligibility to pursue a permanent resident visa, along with more than 1,300 Iranians.

Citizens who once lived under the influence of the Soviet Union also are receiving invitations to pursue an opportunity to immigrate to the United States. More than 7,200 Ukrainians were selected in the lottery, along with almost 2,000 Albanians and 1,700 Bulgarians.

Pleases Note: Most texts and transcript mentioned in the U.S. Mission Daily Bulletin are available via our homepage: <http://geneva.usmission.gov/>

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